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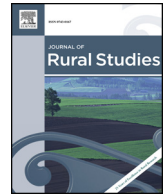
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Precarious rural cosmopolitanism: Negotiating globalization, migration and diversity in Irish small towns

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ABSTRACT

The intensification of global mobility has introduced international migration to rural areas and small towns with little or no significant recent history of immigration. Drawing on an emergent literature in rural studies, this paper seeks to consolidate the concept of 'rural cosmopolitanism' both as a political or ethical project, and in relation to the 'actual-existing cosmopolitanism' of inter-cultural mobility, conviviality and openness to difference in rural communities. The framework is then tested through case studies of two rural small towns in Ireland – Gort, which was home to over 1000 Brazilian migrants in a population of less than 3000 in the late 2000s; and Ballyhaunis, Ireland's most diverse town with 42 different nationalities in a population of around 2300 – to examine the dynamics and relationships that have brought migrants to these towns and shaped their engagement with long-term residents. The paper contends that the emergent cosmopolitanism in the towns is defined by precarity, experienced at different scales from the individual to the community, and informed by broader economic and political trends. The paper argues that the rural context of the towns can serve both to facilitate cosmopolitan relations and to extenuate the precarity of this emerging cosmopolitanism.

1. Introduction

A feature of contemporary globalization has been the increased, extended and intensified mobility of migrants from, to and through the global countryside (Woods, 2007). In many rural regions, this has been experienced primarily in terms of heightened out-migration, either to domestic cities or internationally, on a permanent or temporary basis, as individuals engage with the differentiated geographies of the global economy. Yet, in substantial parts of rural Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, the period since the start of the twenty-first century has been associated with a new dynamic of immigration. The mobility flows that feed this immigration include, variously, transnational lifestyle or amenity migration, return migration by former emigrants, and the resettlement of asylum seekers and refugees, but particularly the international circulation of migrant labour, which has become a key component of the neoliberal rural economy.

The emergence of these new migration channels into rural regions of the global north has been mapped, enumerated and documented by a burgeoning literature in rural geography and rural sociology (e.g. Eimermann et al., 2012; Fonseca, 2008; Hedberg and do Carmo, 2012; Hedberg and Haandrikman, 2014; Labrianidis and Sykas, 2009; Smith and Furuseth, 2006; Woods, 2016). Studies have examined the motivations, experiences and aspirations of migrants (e.g. Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Kasimis et al., 2010; McAreavey, 2012; Nadler, 2012;

Rogaly, 2008; Rye and Andrzejewska, 2009), as well as the interactions between migrants and established rural residents and the transformative impact of international migration on rural communities (e.g. Camarero et al., 2012; de Lima, 2012; Martarrita-Cascante et al., 2015; Nelson and Hiemstra, 2008; Skaptadóttir and Wojtynska, 2008). In so doing, a number of studies have begun to draw on the concept of cosmopolitanism, more conventionally associated with urban settings, and even in a few cases to refer to the possibility of a 'rural cosmopolitanism' (Aguayo, 2008; Popke, 2011; Schech, 2014; Torres et al., 2006). The adoption of this terminology is significant, challenging entrenched pre-conceptions about rural and urban society, and offering potential as an analytical framework, but to date its use has been ill-defined and under-theorised.

As such, this paper aims to develop a more rounded, critical conceptualisation of rural cosmopolitanism, engaging with the emergent literature to examine arguments for the articulation of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices as attributes of both individuals and communities within rural society, and to consider whether the rural context has a facilitative or limiting influence that may produce a distinctive mode of 'rural cosmopolitanism'. The concept is then tested through empirical investigation of case studies of two rural small towns in Ireland that have experienced exceptionally high levels of immigration in the past two decades, Ballyhaunis in County Mayo and Gort in County Galway. From this empirical analysis, the paper will argue that

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evidence of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices can be found in rural towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort, that the rural setting can help to facilitate some aspects of cosmopolitanism, but that there are also restrictive effects of rurality that lead to the actual-existing cosmopolitanism being partial and contingent, and characterised by precarity at individual and collective scales. Accordingly, the paper posits the notion of ‘precarious rural cosmopolitan’ to describe the condition of cosmopolitan thinking and behaviour that can be identified emerging in new immigrant destinations of the rural global north, but which is by no means universal, complete or irreversible.

2. Rural cosmopolitanism

“Rural cosmopolitanism sounds like an oxymoron”, observes Johansen (2008: 1). The very coupling of the terms grates with engrained cultural sensibilities that have conventionally associated cosmopolitan traits of global engagement, cultural hybridity and openness to difference with the city, whilst portraying rural communities as insular, parochial, monocultural, and in short, non-cosmopolitan (Johansen, 2008; Short, 1992; Woods, 2010). Although critical rural studies have critiqued such discourses by revealing the complex inter-local connections and cultural diversity of rural communities even prior to recent patterns of migration, the fixing of cosmopolitanism to urban society has been reinforced by an emphasis in the broader literature on cosmopolitanism as an attribute of elite, transnationally mobile, relatively privileged social actors, whose life-spaces are anchored in global cities (Hannerz, 1990; Kanter, 1995; Sklair, 2001). As Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan remark, this characterisation implies that “there are distinct domains of those who are cosmopolitan and those not yet there”, and thus “wittingly or unwittingly, taints the idea of cosmopolitanism with the dangerous pieties of modernisation theory – that people, places, and cultures exist at different stages of development, and those who are not cosmopolitan suffer from some sort of lack” (2003: 344).

However, the fashioning of cosmopolitanism as an elite property has been critiqued by scholars who have pointed to the existence of ‘ordinary’, ‘vernacular’, ‘banal’ or ‘working class’ cosmopolitanisms, practised and experienced by individuals who are not part of a cultural or economic elite, but whose lives involve the everyday negotiation of cultural difference and transnational mobility (Dunn et al., 2016; Roudometof, 2005; Skrbis and Woodward, 2007; Werbner, 1999). This perspective recognizes that “there is an *unintended and lived cosmopolitanism*” (Beck and Sznaider, 2006: 7, *italics in original*), that is not necessarily always complete or perfect, but in which “people become not simply more or less open and cosmopolitan, but they reservedly deploy their cosmopolitanism, thus allowing us to reconcile the frequently occurring gaps between people’s philosophical commitment to cosmopolitan openness and often parochial practices” (Skrbis and Woodward, 2007: 746).

Empirical studies of ordinary cosmopolitanism have continued to exhibit an urban focus, exploring the public spaces of urban neighbourhoods, and especially neighbourhoods with mixed ethnic populations (Dunn et al., 2016; Ley, 2004), however in expanding the scope of cosmopolitanism, the approach detaches the concept from its spatial ties to the global city. Rather, as Beck and Sznaider (2006) suggest:

the concept and phenomena of cosmopolitanism are not spatially fixed; the term itself is not tied to the ‘cosmos’ or the ‘globe’, and it certainly does not encompass ‘everything’. The principle of cosmopolitanism can be found in specific forms at every level and can be practiced in every field of social and political action: in international organizations, in bi-national families, in neighbourhoods, in global cities, in transnationalized military organizations, in the management of multi-national co-operations, in production networks, human rights organizations, among ecology activists and the paradoxical global opposition to globalization. (Beck and Sznaider,

2006: 3)

In this way, ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’ opens up the possibility of finding cosmopolitan dispositions and practices in non-urban spaces, and thus to asking “how cosmopolitanism is inflected by rural places; ... how members of rural communities imagine their affiliations to the globe and how their location in rural places shapes their framing of cosmopolitan ethical and political responsibilities” (Johansen, 2008: 2).

The notion of ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ has thus begun to emerge in the literature, however as a term that has been introduced independently by several authors working in different disciplinary and geographical contexts, its use so far has lacked a common definition or conceptual coherence. Nonetheless, three broad approaches can be identified.

The first approach positions rural cosmopolitanism as a property of *individuals* who transcend local and non-local (and often rural and non-rural) places and societies. This approach sees cosmopolitan predispositions and practices as involving “mobility, the capacity to consume, be curious, display a willingness in risk-taking, to map and have aesthetic judgement, semiotic skills and a sense of irony and openness to ‘appreciate some elements of the language/culture of the ‘other’” (Cheshire et al., 2014: 88), and, at least implicitly follows Hannerz (1990) distinction between ‘cosmopolitans’ who travel and engage with other cultures, and ‘locals’ who are sedentary and parochial in outlook. Where the approach differs from earlier work on cosmopolitanism is in extending the identification of cosmopolitan actors to encompass previously excluded rural actors.

Thus Cheshire et al. (2014) describe the cosmopolitan routines, competences and dispositions of a group of Australian family farmers who are engaged in international travel and transactions to market their products and research new farming ideas and innovations. The farmers necessarily need to engage with different cultures, to be open to new ideas, and to adopt an international outlook; traits that are reflected back in the management of their own farm. Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003), differently, identify as ‘rural cosmopolitans’ migrant workers from rural communities who inhabit both the world of their home village and that of their host city (whether abroad or in the same country). The mobility of such migrants, they contend, enables the circulation of “sensibilities and ideas, but also materials and techniques that enable the production and transformation of the social space of multiple worlds” (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003: 361–362). For Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, the key competence of rural cosmopolitans is their capacity to “straddle a political world of difference and deploy the technologies of one to some advantage in the other” (ibid.: 343), noting for example, how circular migrants in India may use the skills and knowledge gained in urban employment to challenge exploitative agrarian relations. As such, they argue, rural cosmopolitans “are those who originate in rural areas and who, having become bearers of cultural versatility, turn this to some advantage in either their rural source area and/or their non-rural destinations” (ibid.: 345) (see also Aguayo (2008) on the ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ of Latin American ‘global villages’ and Peluso (2015) on ‘indigenous cosmopolitanism’ in Amazonian frontier communities).

The above examples all attribute cosmopolitan competences to individuals *from* rural communities who travel beyond rural regions and transfer external experiences and opportunities back into the rural sphere. The cosmopolitan nature of migrants *to* rural communities has been less researched, at least explicitly, though studies for example by Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska (2008) on the ‘bifocal’ lives of Polish migrants in Iceland, and by de Lima (2012) on the ‘boundary-crossing’ of migrants in Scotland, highlight similar properties of negotiating difference and living across two cultures, without directly drawing on the language of cosmopolitanism.

Notar (2008) goes a step further, by detaching cosmopolitanism from travel and mobility. In a study of a rural tourist town in south west China, Notar identifies cosmopolitanism not only with the visiting

western backpackers, but also with the owners of cafés and pubs that produce a cosmopolitan atmosphere for the tourists by blending the exotic and the familiar, including offering western food and music. The café owners, Notar argues, have embraced a ‘continuous openness’ to the world by learning languages and different cuisines, despite in most cases never having travelled away from the local area themselves. As such, their cosmopolitanism “has arisen not out of travel (although some of them have later travelled) or out of consumption (although they do that too), but out of their having to *produce* a cosmopolitan atmosphere for those who travel to them.” (Notar, 2008: 639).

The second approach identifies rural cosmopolitanism as a property of *communities*, articulated in the collective practice of openness towards difference and diversity, hospitality towards others, and conviviality. In this respect, it implicitly builds on the association of cosmopolitanism and conviviality – or the condition of ‘living together’ – articulated by Gilroy (2004), Noble (2013), Nowicka and Vertovec (2014) and others. Whilst Gilroy positions ‘conviviality’ as a step beyond cosmopolitanism where racial or ethnic differences become irrelevant; Noble emphasizes the “habitual ways cultural differences are transacted and reconciled in the daily conduct of people in culturally diverse settings” (2013: 163) as the mechanics of actually-existing cosmopolitanism (Robbins, 1998). The emergent rural cosmopolitanism literature with a community focus combines elements of these two iterations, tending to position ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ as a model of conviviality against which actual inter-cultural relations can be measured.

Torres et al. (2006), for example, document a disconnect in parts of the rural southern United States between acceptance of economic contribution and labour power of Latino migrants by the established white population, and reluctance to enact “a form of hospitality that would extend beyond the region’s workspaces and include the full benefits of social and community citizenship” (ibid: 64). They describe the situation as a ‘silent bargain’, in which “the Latino presence within the community is acceptable to established residents, as long as it remains relatively unobtrusive; and the harsh conditions of life and work in rural areas is acceptable to Latinos, as long as they are given the relative space to live in peace” (ibid: 60), and contrast this to the ideal of ‘rural cosmopolitanism’, in which “the contributions and sacrifices of Latino families become a part of the southern conversation, and in which interactions with our Latino neighbors are guided by a form of responsibility that transcends the boundaries of nationality and culture” (ibid: 64).

Adapting the terminology of Torres et al., Schech (2014) describes a similar ‘silent bargain’ in settlement of refugees in an Australian rural town, with humanitarian migrants trading “better long-term opportunities in the metropolis for the relatively peaceful community relations of a small town” (ibid: 614). By emphasizing the latter element, however, Schech goes beyond Torres et al. in recognizing the presence of an emergent and imperfect rural cosmopolitanism in the “growing familiarity with diversity” (ibid.) engendered through everyday encounters and a detectable “sense of pride” (ibid: 612) in the town’s ethnic diversity and capacity to attract migrants.

The third approach to rural cosmopolitanism extends the logic of Torres et al. (2006) argument to conceptualize rural cosmopolitanism in more normative terms as a political or ethical project. This position is articulated by Popke (2011) who, drawing on Keith (2005), suggests that “as an ethic, cosmopolitanism would seek to expand and politicize our sense of thrown-togetherness, and to see in this a rationale for a wider net of engagement and responsibility” (Popke, 2011: 253). In part, Popke’s call is for a relational reading of the rural in which the (sometimes hidden) transnational connections of culture and capital are exposed (cf. Heley and Jones, 2012; Woods, 2007), but it is also a call for more grounded political and ethical practices to foster greater conviviality and solidarity in rural communities. Moreover, Popke makes these calls specifically in relation to rural communities, asking “how rural citizenship might be differently performed and, on this

basis, how to conceptualize in rural settings the kinds of connections and responsibilities that cosmopolitanism seeks to foster” (Popke, 2011: 252). In this way, he draws attention towards the particular characteristics of rural places that might shape the formulation and practice of cosmopolitanism differently in the countryside than in cities, and thus to a distinctive ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ that is more than ‘cosmopolitanism-in-a-rural-setting’.

The normative conceptualisation of rural cosmopolitanism presented by Popke – and in different senses and contexts by Brewer et al. (2017) and by Jansson and Andersson (2012) – is important for reflecting on the responsibility and agency of researchers in promoting and (re-)producing cosmopolitan perspectives and practices; however, there remains a danger that idealizing rural cosmopolitanism downplays the messy reality of actually-existing cosmopolitanism in rural communities. Just as Beck and Sznaider contend that “what cosmopolitanism is cannot ultimately be separated from what cosmopolitanism *should be*” (2006: 4), so the reverse is true, what cosmopolitanism ideally should be cannot be separated from what cosmopolitanism is in its imperfect everyday practice. Indeed, comparisons with urban research on ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’ indicate that rural cosmopolitanism, in its broadest and imperfect sense, is likely more widespread than the literature has so far acknowledged.

Moreover, retreating from idealized notions of rural cosmopolitanism also means recognizing that “rural cosmopolitanism does not always produce progressive political agendas” (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003: 362). As several authors have noted, cosmopolitan traits may be deployed selectively and partially, and may be used to consolidate traditional social and political arrangements (Cheshire et al., 2014; Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003), whilst “cosmopolitan society also includes backlashes against the overall global dynamic: strengthened barriers, exclusion and cultural conflicts” (Jansson and Andersson, 2012: 176). Writing from an urban perspective, Ley argues that cosmopolitanism is “always situated, always imbued with partiality and vulnerability” (2004: 161).

This last observation further points to the precarity of cosmopolitanism, at both the individual and collective scales. The concept of precarity has achieved prominence in recent years, most commonly to describe the neoliberal condition of insecure work, but also to encompass a wider set of individual vulnerabilities to economic, social, political and environmental risks (Ettinger, 2007; Paret and Gleeson, 2016). Migrants – especially undocumented migrants – have been identified as exposed to multiple precarity, often subject to insecure work and insecure citizenship rights, including migrant agricultural workers, as Pye et al. (2012) and Reid-Musson (2014) have detailed. It is in this sense that Budianta (2016) refers to the ‘precarious cosmopolitanism’ of rural-to-urban migrants in south east Asia; however, following the recognition of cosmopolitanism itself as partial and vulnerable discussed above, an alternative meaning of ‘precarious cosmopolitanism’ might also be posited in which precarity is ascribed to cosmopolitan society as a collective condition. Literary scholars Frassinelli and Watson (2013) evoke this rendering when they identify a ‘precarious cosmopolitanism’ – or “a cosmopolitanism in crisis” (ibid.: 2) – in novels by Joseph O’Neill and Phaswane Mpe, yet the precarious position of cosmopolitan ideals and practices they describe is not fictional, but a reflection of real-world experience, and thus may be translated into sociological investigation.

Drawing together these elements, a fuller and more nuanced conceptualisation of ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ can be assembled, that is multi-faceted – recognizing cosmopolitan dispositions as properties both of individuals and of communities; and cosmopolitanism both as a normative model for imagining how inter-cultural relations should be, and as an analytical tool for interpreting how they are negotiated in practice – contested, and precarious. However, with only a restricted literature of studies that have directly examined cosmopolitanism in rural contexts, this conceptualisation lacks robust empirical validation. As such, further research is required that might be organized around the

following key questions:

1. What evidence can be documented for the existence of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices at both individual and collective scales within rural and small town communities?
2. Can distinctively *rural* experiences of cosmopolitanism be identified that differ from the enactment of cosmopolitanism in urban settings, and if so what are the constraining, facilitating or conditioning factors?
3. To what extent are the ideals of cosmopolitanism fully realised in rural communities, and in what ways are the cosmopolitan dispositions and practices of individuals and communities contingent on particular social, economic or political circumstances, and thus vulnerable to change?

The remainder of this paper seeks to contribute to this research endeavour by investigating these questions in relation to case studies of two small towns in rural Ireland.

3. Case studies and methods

This paper reports on case studies of two small towns in rural Ireland, Ballyhaunis in County Mayo and Gort in County Galway, selected as exceptional examples of rural towns with high levels of ethnic diversity, where dynamic around rural cosmopolitanism might be expected to be especially prominent. Both towns experienced significant immigration in the period since the early 1990s, with more than a quarter of the population in each town in the 2011 Census recorded as being born outside Ireland, but with different trajectories towards these outcomes. The population of Ballyhaunis has been shaped by multiple dynamics of economic migration from Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe originating in the 1970s and intensifying in the early 2000s, as well as by the resettlement of asylum seekers and refugees. In contrast, immigration to Gort has been dominated by a single source, Brazil, and concentrated over a shorter period, with the immigrant population in the town peaking in 2008. Both towns have been described as ‘cosmopolitan’ in the Irish popular media, primarily as a synonym for ‘diverse’, but also reflecting a perception of generally harmonious intercultural relations in both towns. The towns are described in more detail in the next section.

The case study research involved multiple methods and data sources and was conducted as part of a wider investigation of globalization and rural communities, in which the emphasis is on how globalization reshapes rural localities and the responses of rural actors, drawing together evidence from different countries across different aspects of globalization. In Ballyhaunis and Gort, data collection focused on the reconstruction of the trajectory of international migration and its impacts in the towns, and on investigation of the reconfiguration of social relations in the communities, drawing both on documentary sources and on interviews with targeted individuals who occupied key positions in community networks (e.g. business leaders, clergy, teachers and community workers) or represented perspectives from different groups within the population. Potential interviewees were initially identified from press reports or due to positions held, with further interviewees recruited through a snowballing approach, and contacted by e-mail. Efforts were made to recruit interviewees from the established Irish population and from the various migrant groups in both towns, but met with an uneven response, with particular difficulties securing interviews with members of the Muslim community in Ballyhaunis and the Brazilian community in Gort, as well as with elected councillors in both towns. This may be attributed to sensitivities around drawing attention to the communities in a wider political-cultural climate in which anti-immigration sentiment is pronounced, as well as in the case of Gort to the contraction of the Brazilian population since 2008 (with many prominent figures having left Gort), and to research fatigue with Gort having been subject to several studies. In total, eleven interviews were

conducted in October 2015 and March 2017; nine in Ballyhaunis, one in Gort and one with a former Ballyhaunis resident; seven of the interviewees were Irish-born (though not necessarily natives of the towns), and four were immigrants (through a variety of routes, including political asylum). Some interviewees were both community leaders and migrants. In reflection of the sensitive nature of the topic, and the increased potential in a small community for individuals to be identified from pseudonymised or anonymised quotes and descriptions, only very limited descriptive detail is provided about the interviewees in this paper to protect individuals from identification. All but one of the interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded.

In order to guard against potential bias from a relatively restricted set of respondents, the interviews have been supplemented by a number of other sources, and factual information, observations and opinions triangulated across different sources. This is indicated in the paper by the citation of multiple interviews and documents as sources of information; and opinions presented by individuals are clearly identified as such. Information was collected from press articles in national and local newspapers, identified through keyword searches of the online Irish News Archive; from sources in the Ballyhaunis and Gort public libraries, including the annual parish magazines (*Annagh* in Ballyhaunis and *Guarie* in Gort); and various documents, reports, briefing papers and publicity materials provided directly by interviewees. In total, over 400 articles and documents were collated and analysed.

Statistical data on population characteristics were obtained from the Irish Censuses in 2001, 2006 and 2011, however, as [Gilmartin and Mills \(2008\)](#), [King-O’Riain \(2007\)](#) and [O’Boyle and Fanning \(2009\)](#) have discussed, these data have significant limitations including the restricted formal categories on Irish census forms for ethnicity, nationality, religion and place of birth, and the non-release of supplementary write-in data for local areas. These limitations preclude for example, precise counts of Brazilian nationals in Gort or of Muslims in Ballyhaunis.

Information has also been drawn from previous published studies on Gort by Garrett Maher ([Maher, 2010](#); [Maher and Cawley, 2016](#)), Brian McGrath ([McGrath, 2010](#); [McGrath and Murray, 2009](#)) and Olivia Sheringham ([Sheringham, 2009, 2010](#)), and on Ballyhaunis by Orla McGarry ([McGrath and McGarry, 2014](#)). These secondary sources were particularly used to identify and analyse evidence for cosmopolitan dispositions and practices during the peak period of Brazilian migration in Gort between 2000 and 2010.

The research also included empirical observation on visits to the towns and informal conversations with residents and other individuals connected with the towns, including as part of an earlier group visit to Gort in August 2011. For example, facilities serving migrant communities were identified and mapped; information noted from posters, signs and shop-front displays; and notes taken on observations of residents using and interacting in spaces such as libraries and cafes. Finally, the analysis and discussion in this paper has also drawn on six interviews conducted with return migrants from Ireland in Vila Fabril, Brazil, in August 2017. Although not directly part of the case study design, these interviews have been used to corroborate factual information, and as additional perspectives on migrant life in Irish small towns.¹

4. Migration and cosmopolitanism in rural Ireland

During the 1990s, the migration balance in Ireland flipped from a historical pattern of substantial emigration to net immigration ([Conlon, 2009](#); [Fitzgerald and Lambkin, 2008](#); [Gilmartin, 2015](#)). The ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom, fuelled by Ireland’s active engagement in the global economy and courting of foreign direct investment, created a

¹ Interviews conducted in Ballyhaunis are referred to in citations by the codes B1, B2 etc, interviews in Gort by G1, etc, and interviews in Vila Fabril by the codes VF1, VF2 etc.

‘goldrush labour market’, in which “an apparently infinite demand for and supply of labour mutually reinforce each other and lead to a sudden expansion of jobs” (Krings et al., 2013: 38). The excess demand for workers over the supply capacity of the endogenous labour market necessitated immigration, by both skilled and unskilled workers, with the latter commonly filling shortages in lower-grade, lower-paid jobs in the food-processing, construction and care sectors that had been vacated by Irish workers upgrading to better-paid positions in manufacturing and services, especially in rural areas (Fanning, 2016; Gilmartin, 2015).

Demands for international labour were initially met through a foreign workers scheme that particularly recruited from the former Soviet Union, as well as by lax immigration rules that allowed nationals from countries such as Brazil to retrospectively apply for work permits. Following the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, Ireland permitted unrestricted access to its labour market for citizens from the new member states of central and eastern Europe (while at the same time tightening restrictions on immigration from outside the EU). Immigration slowed following the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession, and many migrants returned home or moved on to a third country. Nonetheless, the 593,900 non-Irish nationals recorded in the 2016 Census (constituting 14.6 per cent of the population), represent a historic high, more than double the 273,500 non-nationals (7 per cent of the population) recorded in the 2002 Census.

The growth of immigration was accompanied by a re-appraisal of attitudes towards cosmopolitanism. Conventionally, cosmopolitanism in Ireland was primarily perceived in relation to the global mobility and engagement of the Irish diaspora, as well as transnational missionary and humanitarian activities, or as a social distinction that differentiated mobile ‘cosmopolitans’ and sedentary ‘locals’ in Irish society (Conlon, 2009; Gibbons, 2002; Holton, 2009; Inglis, 2008; Kuhling and Keohane, 2007). The impact of immigration prompted a more inward-looking reflection on inter-cultural relations and the practice of hospitality and conviviality. Although there has been a strong discourse of Ireland as a welcoming country, and comparisons have been drawn between the Irish emigrant experience and that of migrants to Ireland as a basis of solidarity, in practice, migrants to Ireland have faced similar discrimination and instances of race crime as in other European countries, and public support for the tightening of immigration and citizenship regulations increased in the 2000s (Conlon, 2010; Fanning, 2016; Holton, 2009; Kline, 2004; Maher and Cawley, 2016). Indeed, Kuling and Keohane (2007) argue that Irish policy towards immigration has emphasized assimilation, seeking to manage diversity rather than to contest inequalities in a condition of ‘weak multiculturalism’.

Moreover, Gilmartin argues that Irish public and political discourse divides immigrants into “those who are encouraged, those who are tolerated, those who are expedient and those who are discouraged” (2015: 28). Returning Irish migrants and business migrants are encouraged, skilled EU migrants tolerated and unskilled migrant workers accepted for economic expediency, but asylum seekers have been vilified in the Irish media and discouraged through increasingly stringent restrictions on their rights and mobility (Burroughs, 2015; Conlon, 2010). A sharp increase in asylum applications from just 39 in 1992, to 1179 in 1996 and a peak of 11,634 in 2002 (Gilmartin, 2015), prompted introduction of a ‘direct provision’ system, placing asylum seekers in one of 75 accommodation centres distributed throughout Ireland, where they are required to stay whilst their applications are processed. In contrast to most other EU states, asylum seekers in Ireland are not permitted to work, but receive a weekly allowance of €19.10 for adults and €9.50 for children (Conlon, 2010; Kinlen, 2011; White, 2012). As such, direct provision functions as a “punitive system” (Fanning, 2016: 43), that is designed to militate against cosmopolitan practices by segregating asylum seekers from the host community and preventing them settling into a locality (White, 2012).

The distribution of asylum seekers through the direct provision system to accommodation centres that are in many cases located in

Table 1

Communities in the Republic of Ireland with the highest proportion of non-Irish national residents, 2011 Census.

Source: Census data downloaded from www.cso.ie

Community	Total Population	Number of Non-Irish Nationals	% Non-Irish Nationals
Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo	2299	953	41.5
Clonee, Co. Meath	629	260	41.3
Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan	1055	403	38.3
Kilcrohane, Co. Cork	88	31	35.2
Edgesworthtown, Co. Longford	1736	572	33.0
Ballyjamesduff, Co. Cavan	2544	810	31.8
Timoleague, Co. Cork	372	112	30.1
Cahir, South Tipperary	3552	1046	29.5
Monaghan, Co. Monaghan	7373	2170	29.4
Shercock, Co. Cavan	526	153	29.1
Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath	1180	341	28.9
Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo	2693	776	28.8
Oldcastle, Co. Meath	1372	394	28.7
Carrigallen, Co. Leitrim	383	109	28.5
Ballymahon, Co. Longford	1553	428	27.6
Gort, Co. Galway	2618	711	27.2
Rathmore, Co. Kerry	772	209	27.1
Bunratty, Co. Clare	153	41	26.8
Saggart, South Dublin	2129	565	26.5
Longford, Co. Longford	9543	2511	26.3

rural towns and villages, the similar distributions to smaller towns of refugees resettled in Ireland under programmes coordinated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and demand for migrant workers to fill labour shortages in food processing and other industries in rural areas, all have contributed to a distinctive geography of immigration in Ireland in which rural districts feature prominently. Although numerically the largest concentration of immigrants is in the Dublin metropolitan area, 18 out of the 20 communities with the highest proportion of non-Irish national residents in the 2011 Census had a total population of less than 5000 people, including Ballyhaunis and Gort (Table 1). This pattern is especially notable given the long history of (ongoing) rural depopulation in Ireland, and the significance of rural counties as the source of emigration to Great Britain, Canada, Australia and the United States, from the early 19th century up to the late 20th century (Fitzgerald and Lambkin, 2008).

Ballyhaunis had the largest proportion of non-national residents of any community in the 2011 Irish Census, at 41.5 per cent of the town's population of 2299 people, with residents drawn from 42 different nationalities. The pattern of immigration to Ballyhaunis, an agricultural town in eastern County Mayo, commenced with the recruited of specialist halal meat butchers from Pakistan to work in a newly converted halal meat plant in 1974. A second, Syrian-owned, halal plant opened in 1983, and although precise figures for the size of the immigrant population during the 1970s and 1980s are difficult to establish, contemporary press reports suggest that there were between 50 and 70 Muslim residents in the town in the early 1990s (Fitzpatrick, 1992; O'Donnell, 1993; Shiel, 1997). The immigration of extended family members, relocation by Muslim workers from other towns in the region where halal meat plants had been closed in 1992, and the natural growth with children born to the initial migrants, further increased the Ballyhaunis Muslim community to 317 people, including 162 children, as recorded by a survey in 2004 (Sheridan, 2004; Shiel, 2004).

Migrant workers were also recruited on annual work permits in the late 1990s from Russia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine to fill shortages in other food processing and manufacturing plants, with an estimated 150–170 non-EU temporary workers in Ballyhaunis in 2002 (Fitzmaurice, 2002; Haughey, 2002). These workers were largely replaced after 2004 by EU workers from Poland, Lithuania and other central and eastern European states, who collectively comprised over a fifth of the town's population by 2011 (Table 2).

Table 2

Population profile of Ballyhaunis, 1996–2011.

Source: Census data downloaded from www.cso.ie, except estimate of Muslim population from press reports and interviews.

	1996	2001	2006	2011
Total population	1287	1358	1672	2299
Non-Irish nationals (%)	n/a	269 (19.8)	587 (35.1)	953 (41.5)
Polish nationals (%)	n/a	n/a	89 (5.3)	175 (7.6)
Lithuanian nationals (%)	n/a	n/a	76 (4.5)	101 (4.4)
Non-European or US nationals (%)	n/a	n/a	257 (15.4)	432 (18.8)
Born outside Ireland (%)	n/a	341 (25.1)	680 (40.7)	1094 (47.6)
Ethnic Asian or Asian Irish (%)	n/a	n/a	160 (9.6)	315 (13.7)
Ethnic Black or Black Irish (%)	n/a	n/a	62 (3.7)	186 (8.1)
Religion other than Catholic (%)	n/a	239 (17.6)	368 (22.0)	673 (29.3)
Muslim (estimated)	~50–70	~200	~350	~500
Asylum seekers and refugees (estimated)	0	85	300	360

In 2001, a former convent was converted into an asylum accommodation centre as part of the direct provision policy, with 85 asylum seekers from 15 countries in residence (Shiel, 2001). The centre subsequently expanded to an average of around 300 residents, primarily from Asia, Africa and the Middle East (Interview B7). In addition, a National Refugee Orientation Centre was established in Ballyhaunis in 2007, hosting groups brought to Ireland under UNHCR programmes whilst they completed orientation courses prior to resettlement elsewhere in the country. Up to 200 individuals passed through the centre each year between 2007 and 2013, including Iranian Kurds, Burmese Karen, Sudanese, Burmese Rohingya and Congolese (Byrne, 2008; Interviews B6, B7).

A mosque was constructed in 1984 and continues to be the focal point of the Muslim community (Scharbrodt et al., 2015). Other commercial and cultural services have developed to meet demand from migrant groups, including Polish and Syrian groceries, halal food and spice shops, money-transfer services, an 'Indian and European' takeaway and an 'Asian, African and European' hairdressers.

Gort preceded Ballyhaunis as the town with the highest proportion of non-national residents in the 2006 Census, at 39.8 per cent, but numbers decreased to 27.2 per cent of the total population of 2618 in 2011 (Table 3). In contrast with Ballyhaunis, the immigrant population in Gort has been dominated by a single nationality, Brazilians. The first six Brazilian migrants were recruited to work in a meat processing plant in the town in 1999, and by 2003 around 80 Brazilians were employed at the plant (Maher and Cawley, 2016; McGrath, 2010; Sheringham, 2009). Following this lead, however, Gort became the nucleus of a larger dynamic of Brazilian migration to Ireland, particularly from the Anápolis area in Goiás state, but also from São Paulo, Londrina and Parana (McGrath, 2010), reaching an estimated peak of 1600 Brazilian nationals in Gort in 2008 (GFRC, 2010). Brazilian migrants were employed in food processing, manufacturing, construction, hospitality,

care services and domestic work, and a practice also developed of (often undocumented) migrants gathering in the town square each morning hoping to be picked-up for casual work in farming or construction.

Brazilian migration underpinned the rapid growth of Gort's population from just over 1100 people in 1996 to over 2700 in 2006, the construction of six new housing estates, as well as of two supermarkets (Maher, 2010; Sheringham, 2010). Facilities specifically for the Brazilian community emerged, including food shops, clothes and shoe shops, beauty salons, internet cafes, money transfer services, and eight Brazilian Pentecostal churches (Healy, 2006; Sheringham, 2010), whilst points of cultural cross-over included football leagues and an annual Quadrilha festival, reflecting Brazilian tradition.

The combination of the closure of the meat plant in 2007, the wider contraction of the economy after 2008, and the tightening of controls on work permits and undocumented migrants led to the shrinkage of the Brazilian community in Gort, with numbers falling to an estimated 400 people by 2012 (Maher and Cawley, 2016).

5. Cosmopolitan mobilities and cultures

Ballyhaunis and Gort may have been transformed by significant immigration, but the population statistics in themselves are not evidence of rural cosmopolitanism. However, probing further into the movements, transactions and experiences of migrants in the two towns, their interactions and engagement with established residents, and the perceptions and attitudes that are deployed to describe these relationships, points to the significance of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices in shaping both the patterns of migration and the ways in which the towns have adapted to diversity.

The arrival of immigrants in the towns can be positioned in the broader context of neoliberal globalization and the internationalization of labour markets, yet in both cases the 'catalysts' (McDonagh et al., 2015) that specifically channelled high volumes of immigration to these particular towns involved the cosmopolitan mobilities of 'transversal enablers' (Radford, 2016; Wise, 2009) in transcending multiple societies. Brazilian migration to Gort followed from the catalytic role of an Irish émigré manager in the Brazilian agribusiness firm JBS and his wife, who organized recruitment of workers to fill labour gaps in the Irish food processing sectors from experienced abattoir workers made redundant by the closure of a JBS meat processing plant in Vila Fabril, near Anápolis, in 1997 (Interviews G1, VF1, VF3; MacCormaic, 2007). In Ballyhaunis, the catalytic role was performed by a Pakistan-born, London-based trader who was asked by the Kuwaiti government to establish a secure supply of halal meat. Selecting the west of Ireland for the reliability of supply from local sheep and beef farms, he bought a family-owned abattoir in Ballyhaunis in 1973 and converted it to halal production with the assistance of skilled halal butchers recruited from Pakistan and Syria (Interviews B5, B7). Significantly, the entrepreneur did not only invest in the plant, but personally moved to Ballyhaunis to manage the business, and used his cosmopolitan understanding of both Islamic and European cultures to smooth relations between immigrants and the local community (Interviews B2, B5, B6).

Table 3

Population profile for Gort, 1996–2015.

Source: Census data downloaded from www.cso.ie, GFRC (2010), Maher (2010), Maher and Cawley (2016).

	1996	2002	2006	2008	2011	2015
Total population	1182	1729	2691	> 3000 ^a	2618	n/a
Non-Irish nationals (%)	n/a	234 (13.5)	1071 (39.8)	n/a	711 (27.1)	n/a
Polish nationals (%)	n/a	n/a	40 (1.5)	n/a	66 (2.5)	n/a
Non-European or US nationals (%)	n/a	n/a	943 (35.0)	n/a	485 (18.5)	n/a
Birthplace outside Ireland (%)	n/a	292 (16.9)	1169 (43.4)	n/a	820 (31.3)	n/a
Brazilian (estimate)	0	> 200	900	1600	< 1000 ^b	< 400 ^b

^a Estimate.^b Includes undocumented migrants who may not be included in Census figures.

As the migrant populations expanded, other transversal enablers employed cross-cultural experiences and competences to act as bridges between communities: a Ballyhaunis teacher who had worked in Kuwait; a former Irish missionary in Brazil who served as priest to the Brazilian congregation in Gort; a Portuguese community development worker who had lived in Brazil; a Syrian Muslim woman who also sat in on Catholic mass. The cosmopolitan competences of these individuals informed the negotiation of difference in the towns (Interview B6; Gross de Almedia, 2008; Maher and Cawley, 2016). Migrants themselves developed cosmopolitan competences which they use to assist new arrivals. Gort, in particular, became a gateway for Brazilian migrants to Ireland, where they would acquire information and obtain national insurance registrations before moving on to other localities in Ireland (McGrath and Murray, 2009; Sheringham, 2010).

Indeed, Brazilian and Eastern European migrants commonly maintain involvement in the social and cultural spheres of both Ireland and their home communities, leading ‘bifocal lives’ (Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska, 2008), working in one country to build a better life in another. Many Brazilian migrants in Gort returned to Brazil for the winter months, sent back remittances or consumer goods bought in Ireland, and/or invested in property or businesses in Brazil (Maher, 2010; Interview G1). An Irish journalist visiting Vila Fabril observed that “every fourth of fifth house is new, elaborately decorated and freshly painted in loud reds, yellows and greens. The more extravagant among them are adorned with steel gates, intercoms, satellite dishes and a new car in the garage Accoutrements stamped with an Irish postmark and paid for by men who would never have heard of Ireland before going to live there” (MacCormaic, 2007: 13). In this way, the migrants enact (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) notion of the rural cosmopolitan deploying the technologies of one society for some advantage in another.

The transversal of geographically distant societies was facilitated by the introduction to Ballyhaunis and Gort of satellite television, internet cafes, webcams, mobile phones, money transfer offices, imported food and ethnic fashions, enabling migrants to “inhabit and [be] bound to two worlds” (McGrath, 2010: 153). Pentecostal churches in Gort celebrate Brazilian festivals and invite guest pastors and preachers from Brazil (Sheringham, 2010), whilst the Ballyhaunis mosque similarly connects Muslim residents to global Islam. To some extent, access to the culturally familiar mitigates against integration into Irish society – the ubiquity of Brazilian satellite television in Gort was criticised for discouraging migrants from learning English (Interview G1; McGrath and Murray, 2009) – but it also underpins a more cosmopolitan mixing and fusing of cultures in the towns, in some cases drawing in Irish participants. The annual Quadrilha festival in Gort, for example, was initiated by Brazilian migrants but came over the years that it ran to be regarded as a town event with active local Irish participation (Connacht Tribune, 2008; Maher and Cawley, 2016; Sheringham, 2010).

Neither was it only the mobility of immigrants that fostered cosmopolitanism, but also the history of Irish emigration. As one interviewee noted, “there has been for one hundred years plus, at least, migration and we’ve got grownups that have an aunt in New York or uncle in Leeds” (Interview B7), such that idea of migration is familiar. Individuals might draw on their own experience of working in Britain or the United States in making comparisons with immigrants to Ballyhaunis or Gort, whilst others evoked collective memories to suggest empathy, including the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) who told students during a visit to Ballyhaunis Community School that “Ireland as a country understood what was happening on the shores of Libya and in Syria with thousands of migrants coming across the Mediterranean ... because we as a nation ... had travelled thousands of miles to America in the 1840s and ever since” (Connaught Telegraph, 2015; also Interviews B1, B6, B7).

Although some question the resonance of the emigration experience with younger generations (Interview B1), the mobilisation of this discourse articulates a context in which immigration and cultural diversity

can be accepted and normalised. This is reinforced by community events that seek to encompass migrant groups within the narrative of local history. A multi-cultural arts festival, for example, promised to “depict the history of Gort from King Guarie (who was famous for extending a welcome to strangers) ... to the arrival of the Brazilians” (Changing Colours Festival promotional material 2007), whilst a pilgrimage procession to a legendary holy well as part of the ‘Ballyhaunis Gathering’ in 2013 included flags representing different nationalities in the town and called at the mosque for a reading from the Quran (Interview B6; Byrne, 2013).

Moreover, the mobility of the Irish is perceived not merely as historical. The annual parish magazines for Ballyhaunis and Gort both include numerous articles by residents reporting on travels to ‘exotic’ locations, as well as by emigrants from the towns living abroad, thus somewhat incongruously asserting the agency of the Irish community as mobile subjects connecting the town to the world, whilst simultaneously normalising the mobility of the immigrant population. Indeed, the cultural diversity of the towns can be represented as equipping local young people to travel and work as cosmopolitan subjects:

All the kids grow up here in a good way for life elsewhere. I think they’d have a pretty strong grounding in what it means to be Irish if they’ve grown up in a small town, but with a world leaning let’s say to know what Ramadan is, to know where the geography that people have come from that perhaps only a city could offer. So in that sense it has some advantages that help people in the future. (Interview B7)

6. Negotiating difference in a small town

The practices of cosmopolitanism in Ballyhaunis and Gort have many similarities with accounts of ordinary cosmopolitanism in urban centres, but there are also key respects in which they are shaped by the rural small town setting. In contrast to the clustering of ethnic neighbourhoods in larger cities, the homes of the immigrant populations in the towns are in most part interspersed with those of the established Irish population. The small size and intimacy of the community also makes migrants visible and thus knowable, as several interviewees described from personal experience:

Ballyhaunis at the time it was still very much a kind of old fashioned Irish town and not very diverse as it is now. I remember I was meeting people on the street everybody was saying hello. Everybody looked at me as I was something different and it was a nice feeling because where I came from nobody look at me. So it was nice. I would feel quite welcome when I lived there for the first year. (Interview B4, migrant)

[In] the bigger cities you generally feel lost, lonely. In a smaller community you’re more visible and if it’s a small town and there is more older people and they’re usually more friendly ... if you are a new person you are kind of visible and the Irish are friendly. You actually do feel part of the town even, as I said before, hello, how are you? I didn’t realise at the time that How are you is only a formal greeting. I felt they’re actually interested how I am, and that was making me feel even that, but it was nice and friendly people. (Interview B3, migrant)

On the plus side though it does, I think, it provides an opportunity where you actually can get to know people a little better than compared to a city ... but being recognised in the community, how are you Ahmed, how are you Petra. It is a little more possible here. Whether there’s any value in that I don’t know, but if you can live in a small town I think it offers a secure, safe environment. (Interview B7, Irish)

So I suppose in a smaller community sometimes there less chance of becoming anonymous. Whereas in a larger city you can very quickly be forgotten about. So that’s an advantage I would say and here in

the school a lot of our teachers do come from the town, the catchment area, and they get to know children and keep an eye out for them and stuff like that. (Interview B1, Irish)

Everyday encounters between immigrants and established residents followed from the necessity of sharing space in small towns with only a limited number of workplaces, shops and public facilities such as schools, libraries and playgrounds. Although specialist shops opened to serve particular migrant groups in Ballyhaunis and Gort, the majority of established and migrant residents alike used the same supermarkets, which adapted to demands for diverse foods. Schools, in particular, became key sites of interaction, with only a single high school in both towns, such that as one teacher explained:

We're a stand-alone school. That's how we operate and we accept all comers. We don't discriminate in terms of race, religion, anything of that nature. So anybody who comes here [if] they're of the correct age. (Interview B1)

Consequently, in 2015, Ballyhaunis High School included pupils from 27 different nationalities, while over half of the pupils at Ballyhaunis National (Primary) School were non-Irish, drawn from at least 14 nationalities (personal communication). At the height of the Brazilian community in Gort, the Scoil Eoin Boy's School included 41 Irish children and 36 Brazilian children (Gross de Almedia, 2008). By comparison, across Ireland only 10 per cent of secondary school students and 6 per cent of primary school pupils were non-Irish nationals in 2007 (Byrne et al., 2010).

The schools actively work to promote cosmopolitan dispositions, for instance through a multi-cultural day at which pupils dress in national costume and create stalls about their own cultures, but cosmopolitan practice is also engendered and reproduced through friendships and playground games, and extends to bringing parents into contact (Interviews B1, B3, B6, B8, B10; Browne, 2007; Commings, 2004; Gross de Almedia, 2008) (although the primary school in Ballyhaunis adopts a contrasting approach, deliberately not recognizing cultural differences to encourage children to see each other as equals).

Similarly, the limited number of social organizations and sports clubs in the towns acts to bring together migrants and established residents with common interests, with one interviewee observing that, "it's more accessible because in a small town those groups are actively looking for people to take part ... I know now some groups would pride themselves in saying well actually we've got two Syrians and a guy from Nigeria and it's a great contribution to our team" (Interview B7). Thus, Brazilians joined football teams in Gort, and Pakistanis formed a cricket club in Ballyhaunis, which has grown to include Irish members (Interview B1; Loftus, 2015).

Perhaps most iconic and intriguing, has been the role of the GAA clubs, responsible for the Gaelic sports of hurling, Gaelic football and camogie, in inter-cultural relations in the two towns. The GAA is an important part of Irish rural life, with an amateur ethos and pyramid structure founded on local clubs in most rural communities. It has also long been closely associated with Irish nationalism and until relatively recently GAA members were prohibited from also playing 'foreign' sports such as soccer, cricket or rugby (Cronin, 1999; Gilmartin, 2015). As such, the inclusion of migrants from Brazil, Asia, Africa and elsewhere in GAA teams in Ballyhaunis and Gort has attracted national media attention (Butler, 2015; Glennon, 2008; Stafford, 2008).

The GAA clubs in both Ballyhaunis and Gort have been active in promoting migrant participation in the sports, including by appointing Integration Officers. In Ballyhaunis, the GAA has run integration days aimed at demonstrating the sports to non-Irish migrants – including children from the asylum accommodation centre – and produced multilingual posters to advertise games (Interviews B2, B4). Significantly, these initiatives have been underpinned by a philosophy of respecting difference whilst sustaining tradition, as articulated in a flyer from the Ballyhaunis GAA:

The GAA Club invite all new Ballyhaunis families to share in its community activities. The Club welcome and will respect the native language and traditions of the new families. By exchange, by learning from each other and by working together we can all make Ballyhaunis a better place for all its people. (Promotional material).

As such, schools and sports clubs in Ballyhaunis and Gort can be seen as sites that promote not necessarily integration or assimilation, but more cosmopolitan traits of encountering and negotiating difference. In common with multi-cultural schools elsewhere, schools in Ballyhaunis have had to negotiate issues around the correspondence of western and Islamic cultures, including around music, and pressures for young men to wear beards and for young women to wear headscarves (Interviews B1, B6, B10; McGrath and McGarry, 2014; also Devine, 2013, Devine and Kelly, 2006). Meanwhile, players fasting for Ramadan has presented an unexpected challenge for sports coaches (Interview B1).

The rural setting of Ballyhaunis and Gort has hence promoted cosmopolitan practices by necessitating interaction and engagement, but there are still limitations to the cosmopolitan experiences, some of which are compounded by rurality. In spite of the compact size of the towns, there are microgeographies in the way in which space is used by migrant and established residents. Many Irish residents in Ballyhaunis have not been to the mosque or the asylum centre, one interviewee noting that people had said to him, "I know where the [asylum centre] is because it's on a hill; it's visible but I haven't been there; I don't know if I'm allowed to go" (Interview B7; also Sheridan, 2004). The migrant-owned food shops tend not to be frequented by Irish residents, and whilst some Brazilian, Eastern European and African migrants worship at the Catholic parish churches, there is religious fragmentation not only with the Ballyhaunis mosque, but also with Portuguese-language Pentecostal churches in Gort, and new migrant-dominated evangelical and Jehovah's Witnesses meetings in Ballyhaunis (Interviews B3, B6, G1; McGrath and Murray, 2009; Sheridan, 2004). Equally, pubs and bars are avoided by migrants, not only teetotal Muslims, but also Brazilian and Eastern European migrants who dislike the pub culture or prefer to socialize at home (Interviews B3, B6; Sheringham, 2009).

Participation in community social activities by migrants is also constrained by cost, unsociable working hours and lack of transport, as well as by the essentially private nature of the social infrastructure (also McGrath and Murray, 2009):

Ballyhaunis doesn't offer a lot of opportunities for integration. In fairness there isn't much going on and especially if you're not local you don't know. There might be some clubs. I lived there for three or four years, I just figured out there is a library. There is a golf club which is for people from like the cream of society. That's not even come close, and maybe there is GAA which I didn't have a clue what GAA is all about. (Interview B4).

As such, cosmopolitanism in smaller communities such as Ballyhaunis and Gort may be considered to be compromised by the absence of the public spaces and institutions found in larger cities that can facilitate the more open participation and engagement of diverse cultural groups. This contrast may be particularly relevant in relation to the differentiated capacity to participate of individuals within migrant groups, including a distinct gendered differentiation. Muslim girls in Ballyhaunis, for example, are limited in their ability to mix outside school by Islamic cultural norms (McGrath and McGarry, 2014), whilst Brazilian women in Gort were noted to be often tied to their homes by childcare and limited English language competence (Interview G1; McGrath and Murray, 2009). In both cases, isolation was compounded by the absence of safe social spaces within their ethnic community and support networks, as might exist in larger cities.

Asylum seekers in Ballyhaunis are especially restricted in their social engagement with the local community by lack of money, exclusion from employment, the difficulties of making commitments when the

duration of their time in the town is uncertain, and the constraints of their accommodation that require the negotiation of additional obstacles:

So people have friendships and they want to invite a friend home or for the birthday party. I think being an asylum seeker that's one difficulty in that you can't really receive anyone into your home. You're sharing with other people ... now let's say my son has a birthday party I can invite his friends from school because it wouldn't be during the night. It's during the day and if it was in the week I can put it to a Saturday so that everybody can come when they finish by four, five and be gone. (Interview B8).

Challenges such as these impact not only on the quantity of interactions between migrant and established populations in towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort, but also on the quality, with one observer commenting that cross-cultural exchanges stopped short of established residents appreciating the particular circumstances of migrants they encounter:

It's just the craic of the Irish women coming in here into this room and having their nails done for communions and confirmation, and they were lined up against that wall with their feet up and, you know, their feet out. I always feel sympathy for migrants having to do other people's feet, but the banter and the craic but also it was funny [the Brazilian salon workers were] in a very vulnerable situation and you've the Irish woman getting ready for the big family wedding or the event and having the craic and whatever, and completely blissfully unaware of the life and the circumstances of that young wee girl polishing their nails. (Interview G1).

The cosmopolitanism of Ballyhaunis and Gort is therefore partial and imperfect, and resonates in many respects with [Torres et al. \(2006\)](#) notion of the silent bargain. As in [Torres et al.'s](#) and [Schech \(2014\)](#) case studies in the United States and Australia, many migrants in Ballyhaunis and Gort originate from rural areas, and many have opted to live in the towns because of their perceived safety and tranquillity compared with urban areas, despite the restricted opportunities and limited support services (Interviews B7, B8, G1; [Healy, 2006](#)). Equally, established residents emphasized the reliance of the local economy on migrant labour, and were prepared to accept cultural change for the economic benefits. As in the southern US, this could extend to relative tolerance towards undocumented migrants, with Gort gaining a reputation during the 2000s as a place where a 'blind eye' was turned to immigration status ([Sheringham, 2009](#); [Maher and Cawley, 2016](#); [Murray, 2010](#)). Yet this accommodation was forged in a particular context of economic prosperity, and subsequent developments reveal the precarity of the rural cosmopolitan condition, as the final section discusses.

7. Precarious rural cosmopolitanism

The emergent rural cosmopolitanism of Ballyhaunis and Gort is imperfect and partial, and these qualifications reflect the precarity both of individual migrants and of the cosmopolitan relations and practices that can be observed. Individually, migrants in Ballyhaunis and Gort share the precarity of all migrants caught between two cultures, as a prominent member of the Muslim community explained to a local newspaper:

They worry about a loss of identity, they are insecure, they feel that people do not understand them and they worry about the dangers of Western culture. There is a blanket of fear and insecurity that is threatening to envelope the immigrant community in Ballyhaunis. ([Browne, 2007](#): 10).

The precarity of individual migrants differed, moreover, according to their legal status, employment and gender, and in each case was amplified by the rural context of the towns. The tendency for migrant

labour to be employed to fill low-grade positions that Irish workers avoided, for instance, means that they are disproportionately employed in precarious work, at risk from exploitation and victimization, which is heightened by the small size of rural workplaces and often informal employment practices ([Maher and Cawley, 2016](#); [McGrath, 2010](#)). There are numerous reports of wages being held back from Brazilian casual workers, whilst one interviewee noted the risks for workers being taken out to remote rural locations to work: "maybe if you're in a big city if you're working alone you're also going to be at risk, but there's something about a rural area and not knowing the highroads and by-roads and direction that you've been brought in. These warrens of boynes and places. It's risky" (Interview G1).

The economic recession in 2008 particularly intensified the precarious position of immigrants in Ireland, as stable employment dried up and migrant workers moved into riskier, informal jobs in which they were more prone to the exploitation described above (Interview G1). In some cases, migrants were unfamiliar with the concept of a recession and the challenges that it presented, the Gort Family Resource Centre noting that "the notion of 'economic recession' was new to Brazilians and their failure to grasp its potential consequences [has] brought us to the present unfortunate problems of poverty within the Gort community" ([Murray, 2010](#)). Moreover, the comparatively small and fragmented character of migrant communities in rural towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort meant that migrants commonly lacked access to the informal family and community support networks that [Murphy and Scott \(2014\)](#) identified as important to the coping strategies of Irish rural households during the recession. Whilst many migrants opted to leave Ireland, others lacked funds or resources to return home or move elsewhere, leading to the establishment of the Voluntary Assisted Return and Repatriation Programme (VARRP) by the International Organization for Migrants, to help 'vulnerable' migrants to return home, notably Brazilians in Gort ([Murray, 2010](#)). However, migrants returning to Brazil encounter limited employment opportunities and high levels of crime, relative to rural Ireland, and many express a desire to go back to Ireland, with some doing so at high personal risk as undocumented migrants (Interviews G1, VF1, VF4, VF5).

The vulnerability of undocumented migrants, especially among the Brazilian community in Gort, is increased by their legal precarity, which limits their ability to report abuse or exploitation for fear of identification and deportation ([Maher and Cawley, 2016](#)). Rumours of immigration checks prey on the precarity of undocumented migrants, with individuals missing work and thus foregoing pay as they try to avoid being visible (Interview G1). Similarly, the direct provision system for asylum seekers in Ireland is explicitly designed to institutionalise precarity ([Conlon, 2010](#); [Gilmartin, 2015](#)). For residents of the asylum centre in Ballyhaunis, this precarity was experienced through the inflexibility of communal catering, restrictions of mobility, and limited spending money, all restricting their involvement in the community (Interviews B7, B8) and amplified by their visibility in a small town:

People shouldn't be living institutionalised for so many years, but if [asylum centres] exist they should not be in small towns like Ballyhaunis because you're immediately singled out. If you are African appearance it's definitely you're from the [centre]. Everybody knows that you're vulnerable. Everybody knows you live on nineteen Euro. You can be targeted as a victim of abuse, all sorts of ... whatever. (Interview B4).

The precarity of asylum seekers in Ballyhaunis is further reinforced by uncertainty about the duration of the asylum application process, which may take several years, and thus their precarious residence in the town. Individuals can be moved between asylum centres with limited notice, and even if successful in their asylum claims tend not to stay in the locality. Interviewees could think of only one family that had remained in Ballyhaunis after obtaining asylum, with most either opting to move to towns and cities with larger concentrations of their national

community or forced by the limitations of the rural housing market to move elsewhere in the region (often to smaller, less diverse rural communities) because of the shortage of appropriate accommodation in the town (Interviews B4, B8, B10). This uncertainty militates against asylum seekers building relationships or participating in community activities in the town, with a teacher recounting the case of a gifted and popular teenage member of the school hurling team who disappeared mid-season when his family was relocated to a different accommodation centre (Interview B4).

In response to the precarity of individual migrants, a number of support and advocacy groups have emerged, both from within the migrant communities – groups representing Brazilian migrants in Gort and East European migrants in Ballyhaunis, for example – and at broader scale in local civil society, including Gort Embracing Migrants (GEM), Mayo Inter-cultural Action (MIA), and activities by Gort Regional Alliance for Community and Environment (GRACE) and the Family Resource Centres in the towns (Haughey, 2002; Healy, 2006; McGrath and Murray, 2009; Interviews B4, B7, G1). These groups may be positioned as an expression of the normative rural cosmopolitanism envisaged by Popke (2011), organising activities designed to foster inter-cultural engagement including a bilingual newsletter in Gort, an inter-cultural soccer tournament and events such as a celebration of world refugee day. However, whilst in urban areas such initiatives might draw support from a wider progressive civil society network, in rural small town settings they are challenged by the restricted pool of participants and competition with established social calendars, often struggling to attract involvement from the settled local community. Moreover, such groups are vulnerable to over-dependence on a limited number of key individuals and on short-term funding.

Indeed, it is not only the position of individual migrants that might be described as 'precarious', but the condition of emergent rural cosmopolitanism itself. Firstly, the acceptance of immigrants in the 'silent bargain' of rural communities is conditional on a strong economy. In Ballyhaunis and Gort references to immigration during the early 2000s were frequently accompanied by statements such as, "it should be noted that all of these people are contributing to our economy as they are all in full time employment" (Fitzmaurice, 2001: 38). The recession after 2008 weakened this formulation, with some evidence of increased perceptions of migrants 'taking jobs' from Irish citizens, especially in Gort (employment has remained more buoyant in Ballyhaunis, in part due to the strength of the halal-export market) (Ni Chonchúir, 2009: B5; Interviews B7, B10). Recession and the contraction of employment opportunities increased the economic and social precarity of individual migrants, and led to many leaving Ireland, removing key individuals from cosmopolitan initiatives and reducing the support base for services and groups focused on migrant communities.

Secondly, the changing economic climate has also been reflected in shifting political attitudes, including a hardening of opinion towards undocumented migrants, which has been reflected in media coverage and in state practice. Whilst occurring at wider scales, both these developments have affected migrants in Ballyhaunis and Gort. Stricter border controls on (suspected) undocumented migrants, for example, dissuaded many Brazilian residents in Gort from making annual trips home for fear of being unable to re-enter Ireland, thus curtailing their agency as cosmopolitan subjects moving between cultures (MacCormaic, 2008). More broadly, the introduction of austerity policies by the Irish Government from 2008 cut funding that had previously underpinned cosmopolitanism, with reductions in support for schools and civil society groups (Interviews B1, B4, B10). The rationalisation of public services in rural areas has increased problems of access for migrants without private transport, and altered the way in which the state engages with migrant communities, as one community worker explained:

We had a wonderful immigration guard who had a great understanding. He retired. Then we've had another one, but there have

been changes and a reduction in services in relation to guards here. Now we've got an immigration guard who travels from Loughrea on certain days and times and it's not the same. GNIB cards originally they could issue them from here, from Gort. The noose is tightening and tightening and departments are all talking to each other (Interview G1).

Thirdly, cultural attitudes towards immigration have shifted in response not only to changing economic conditions but to the global rise of Islamic terrorism and the European refugee crisis (Scharbrodt et al., 2015). Whilst instances of racial hostility or hatred in Ballyhaunis and Gort continue to be extremely rare, there is recognition that more extensive, and sometimes more critical, public attention has been directed towards the migrant communities, with one interviewee observing for example that "for many, many years the Muslim population lived here almost under the radar, if you like, but certainly with the global events over the last fifteen years the Muslim population in Ballyhaunis has come under the microscope" (Interview B1). At the same time, there is a widespread perception that the Muslim community in Ballyhaunis has become more defensive and withdrawn, and that there has been a hardening of conservative Islamic culture associated with leadership changes at the Mosque, the establishment of a Madrassa for religious instruction, and exposure to radical Islamic influences through the internet (Interviews B1, B6, B10). These developments are regarded as contrary to the spirit of cosmopolitanism as they have disengaged some Muslim residents from wider community activities and generated distrust.

More broadly, questions have been raised about the capacity of small towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort to continue to absorb larger and more diverse numbers of immigrants, with suggestions that a threshold has been reached. One interviewee observed that community relations, "worked great with the first wave when we had only one ethnic group for forty years and everything was great. That was the Pakistani group that came in here. I mean, that was fantastic, but Ballyhaunis had only to deal with one. It's the multiplicity, the diversity. That is now the big challenge. I mean, anybody can deal with one problem at a time, but to deal with twenty variations on that is ..." (Interview B2). Another suggested that familiarity with immigration had eroded the friendliness towards new arrivals that had once characterised the small town experience: "A simple example, when I walk on the street nobody really looks at me anymore and say hello, how are you? It's darker. It's different. It's a different feel. Well now so many Eastern European faces, new people. The town has been soaked with new culture and the new type of people. I'm not exotic anymore there" (Interview B4).

The growth and longevity of the migrant communities in Ballyhaunis and Gort has also added new layers of complexity around which cosmopolitan relations need to be negotiated. These include relations between different migrant groups, for instance Eastern Europeans and Asians, or Eastern Europeans and Brazilians, where interactions are perceived to be limited; inter-generational differences in outlook within migrant populations, particularly the Muslim community; and intra-cultural tensions within ethnic groups based on religious, political, linguistic or regional differences – between Pubjabi and Urdu speakers, or between Syrian migrant workers and Syrian refugees in Ballyhaunis, or between Brazilians from Goiás and São Paulo provinces in Gort (Interviews B2, B3, B4, B10; McGarry, 2012; McGrath, 2010; McGrath and McGarry, 2014; McGrath and Murray, 2009; Sheridan, 2004; Sheringham, 2010). Whereas in larger urban areas, tensions between these groups might be defused by the establishment of parallel community networks and religious congregations, the restrictions of small town life compelled them to share the same spaces and work through differences, often against a backdrop of limited awareness of inter-communal differences and tensions by the Irish population.

8. Conclusion

The intensification of transnational mobility in the global countryside has had a transformative impact on many rural and small town communities, with relatively settled and often largely monocultural societies being restructured by the arrival of international labour migrants, lifestyle migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This paper has sought to advance the now burgeoning literature documenting the emergence of these new immigration destinations by drawing on the concept of cosmopolitanism to expound a framework for analysis of how inter-cultural differences are approached, negotiated and potentially contested in the localities concerned. Building on the limited previous references to ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ in the rural studies literature, the paper has proposed a multi-layered model in which cosmopolitanism can be understood variously as an individual property of actors who transcend different cultural worlds; as a collective property of communities embracing difference; and as a normative project to promote open and cordial relations between cultural groups. However, it also contends that cosmopolitanism should not be positioned as an ‘ideal’ but should be recognised and studied in its ‘actually-existing’ form, following the emphasis of recent debates in cosmopolitanism studies.

The case studies of Ballyhaunis and Gort have formed sites through which to explore the above argument; as small towns with relatively large populations of recent immigrants they are prime examples of the kinds of contexts in which rural cosmopolitanism might be expected to be observed, yet as highlighted in the discussion, both are characterised by distinctive local dynamics that must be taken into account when drawing generalisations from the empirical findings. Nonetheless, the evidence from the two towns broadly supports the assumptions made in proposing the framework of rural cosmopolitanism.

To return to the research questions articulated in the first part of this paper, Ballyhaunis and Gort provide evidence of the existence of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices at both individual and collective scales in small town communities; demonstrate distinctive features of the rural small town setting that variously facilitate and constrain cosmopolitanism; but also point to a partial realisation of the ideals of cosmopolitanism that is contingent on particular social, economic and political circumstances. Evidence of cosmopolitan dispositions and practices in Ballyhaunis and Gort include convivial relations between cultural groups and openness to new arrivals; the acceptance of cultural diversity, as manifested in the range of food shops and places of worship; the social mixing of residents from different ethnic and cultural groups in schools, churches and sports clubs; and, critically, the active negotiation of difference in spaces such as schools and community events to accommodate and respect diverse cultural backgrounds whilst maintaining local heritage and sense of place. As such, cosmopolitanism in Ballyhaunis and Gort is grounded in everyday practice and facilitated by the actions and attitudes of individuals, several of whom have used their own cosmopolitan subjectivities and experiences to bridge cultures and smooth interactions as transversal enablers. As in Radford's (2016) study of a rural town in South Australia, transversal enablers can be found both in the established local population and among new migrants.

The everyday foundation of cosmopolitanism in Ballyhaunis and Gort further resonates with accounts of ‘ordinary’ or ‘vernacular’ cosmopolitanism observed in mixed-ethnicity urban neighbourhoods (Beck and Sznaider, 2006; Noble, 2013; Robbins, 1998). However, the case studies also show how the experience and practice of cosmopolitanism is shaped by local factors that are expressions of their rural setting: the lack of anonymity in a small community; the shared use of singular spaces and services; the absence of residential segregation; common workplaces; and a sense of collective interest in sustaining the community. These attributes arguably militate against segregation and polarisation and help to foster cosmopolitan practices. Accordingly, the experience of Ballyhaunis and Gort is more than just (urban)

cosmopolitanism transposed to a small town, but has hallmarks of a characteristically *rural* cosmopolitanism (see also Krivokapic-Skoko et al., 2018, in this special issue, for similar findings from rural towns in Australia).

Yet, the rural setting of Ballyhaunis and Gort also introduces factors that can challenge or constrain cosmopolitanism: notably the small size of individual ethnic communities and the absence or limited extent of support networks within or for these communities, as well as the restricted options available for employment or consumption, and the visible ‘otherness’ of ethnic minority residents. These factors act to compromise the ‘actual-existing’ cosmopolitanism of towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort, such that cosmopolitan ideals are arguably not fully realised despite the surface appearance of openness and conviviality. It is in this sense that the paper proposes the notion of *precarious rural cosmopolitanism*, with precarity evoked at two levels. Firstly, it recognizes that even within a broadly cosmopolitan society, individual migrants can experience precarity in terms of economic uncertainty and exploitation, limited citizenship rights, and exposure to harassment and violence (there are parallels here between migrant workers in rural Ireland and the precarious conditions of migrant workers observed elsewhere by Budianta, 2016, Pye et al., 2012, Reid-Musson, 2014, and others). Secondly, it emphasizes that the cosmopolitan community ethic found in rural towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort is itself precarious, vulnerable to changing economic conditions and shifting political and cultural attitudes both within and outside the locality. Some of the compromises and vulnerabilities in the partial cosmopolitanism of Ballyhaunis and Gort echo the ‘silent bargain’ observed by Torres et al. (2006) and Schech (2014) in the United States and Australia respectively, however the concept of precarious rural cosmopolitanism has the capacity to go beyond the complicity implied by the ‘silent bargain’ by recognizing a wider range of factors shaping the condition of rural cosmopolitanism and emphasizing the risk of immanent change.

Recognition of the precarious rural cosmopolitanism of towns such as Ballyhaunis and Gort has implications for policy and practice, as well as for social scientific analysis. It challenges assumptions that are commonly asserted in popular discourses and used to justify a lack of government attention to inter-cultural relations in rural areas, and instead emphasizes the need for cosmopolitanism to be actively supported, managed and resourced in rural localities experiencing immigration. In the Irish context in particular, it raises questions about the impact of austerity policies that have cut funding from initiatives that support cross-cultural interactions or help schools and other institutions adapt to diversity, or rationalised public services, closing sites of community interaction or reducing sensitivity to local circumstances; as well as questions about the workings of the direct provision system for asylum seekers that actively discourage the building of community ties that are part of cosmopolitan society. However, the concept of precarious rural cosmopolitanism is transferrable beyond Ireland to other contexts, and its lessons have wider applicability.

More broadly, the concepts of ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ and ‘precarious rural cosmopolitanism’ add to the tools available for research on migration and globalization in rural social science, and have the potential to enable what have often been largely empirical studies of immigration in rural regions to be developed with a more critical, theoretically-engaged analysis that can draw connections to wider social theories, make comparisons with urban experiences, explore the significance of rural setting, understand factors shaping dynamic situations and the contingent links between translocal economic and political processes and local outcomes, and propose strategies for working towards a normative ideal. At the same time, the concept of precarious cosmopolitanism, outlined here, arguably has relevance beyond rural settings, and might equally be applied in urban contexts, further developing work on ordinary or vernacular cosmopolitanism in urban neighbourhoods.

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